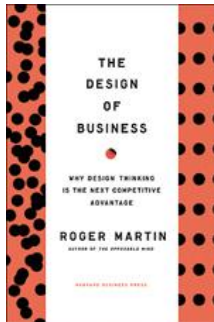## Think Out Of The Box

'The Design Of Business' is geared to transform the idea of design thinking into action and demonstrates how corporations have made it part of their culture

By Devdutt Pattanaik

The Design Of Business:
Why Design Thinking Is The Next Competitive Advantage;
By Roger Martin
Harvard Business Press
Pages: 182
Price: Rs 995

There are two ways of doing things. one way is to repeat the tried and tested. The other is to do things the new way. What Roger Martin, the dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, believes strongly is that it makes business sense to combine both approaches. One need not exclude the other. Often, organisations focus on one or the other. There are companies obsessed with the process of efficiency and so they end up, sometimes unknowingly, discouraging innovation.

On the other hand, there are firms so obsessed with innovation that they forget to make it viable. Design management is about balancing the two. In a way, it is about balancing the left brain that looks at the money counters and the right one that looks at the idea. Martin tells us how.

The Design Of Business, which follows the popular *The Opposable Mind: How Successful Leaders Win Through Integrative Thinking* (2007), is geared to transform the idea of design thinking into action. The chapters are structured in such a way that the book almost becomes a user's manual. And besides 'selling the idea', the author — an advisor on strategy to the CEO's of several major global corporations — creates frameworks that will help people walk the path of design thinking.

Design thinking is not a new idea. And many people are aware of it. "Design thinking,

as a concept, has been slowly evolving and coalescing over the past decade," writes Martin. However, while the idea is very appealing, it becomes difficult to make it part of an organisational culture.

The book, through examples, shows how organisations that have made it part of the culture have benefited from it. Martin also goes into details as to how, if one wishes, one can implement design thinking into the organisation and more importantly develop oneself as a design thinker. "The design-thinking organisation applies the designer's most crucial tool to the problems of business. That tool is abductive reasoning," Martin writes. Also important are the sections that discuss how one has to deal with the harsh reality of being a design thinker in an environment which is inadvertently hostile to it.

A key point that the author brings out is the difference between reliability and validity. Often, organisations demand reliability of a point of view. They demand proof of concept before the concept is developed. This kills all creativity and prevents new ideas from flowering. The key point that allows for innovation is the idea of validity. Is the idea valid first? Reliability can be looked at later.

While the book looks at the idea of developing an individual as a design thinker, what is, perhaps, missing is the role of leadership in design thinking. Ultimately, it all flows down from the top. A leader is, whether s/he wants to be or not, the fountainhead of organisational culture. Unless s/he is a design thinker or at least a patron of design thinking, nothing will happen.

The author writes on mythology and is chief belief officer with the Future Group

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